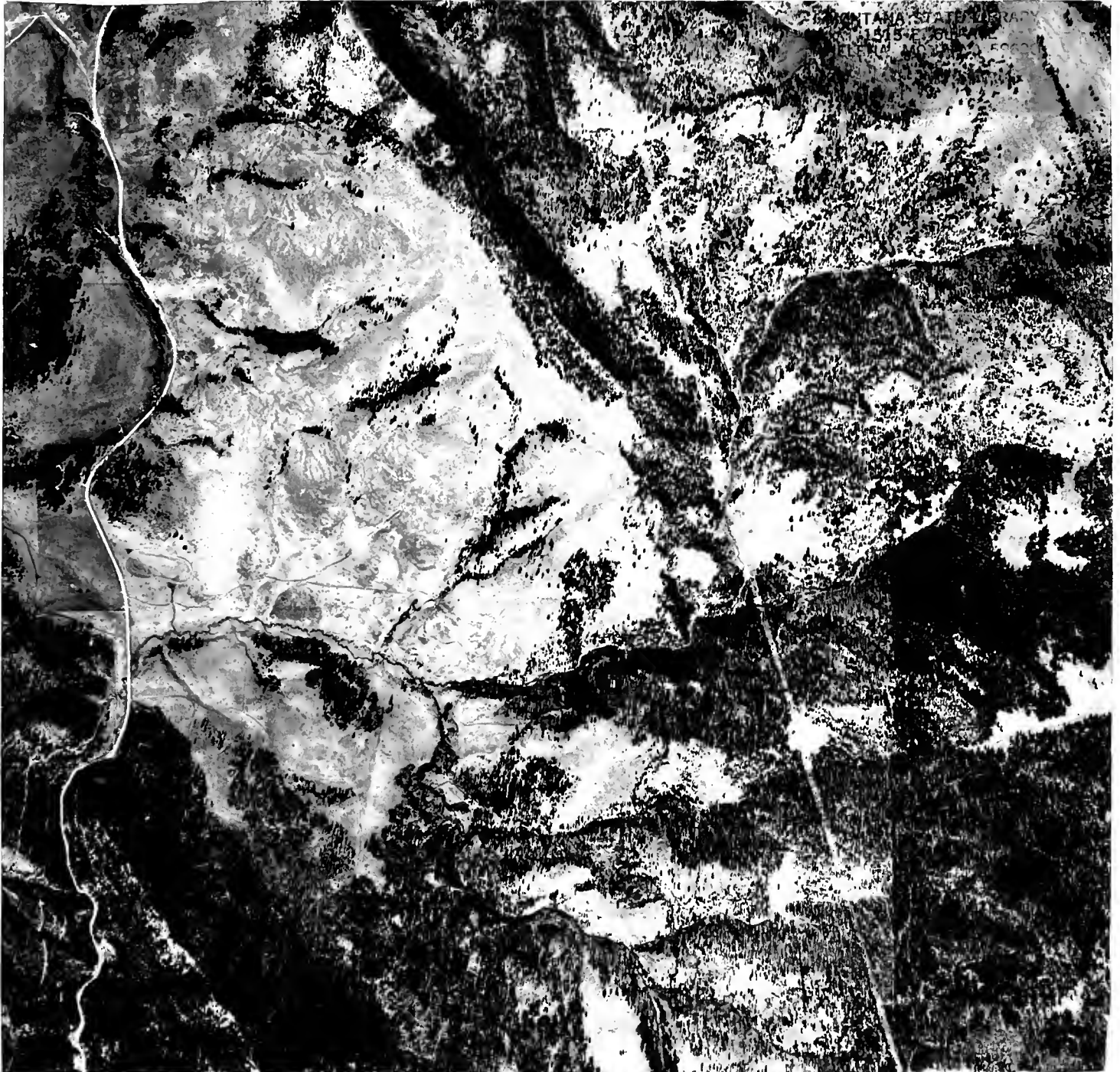


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ANILEY CONSERVATION EASEMENT

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DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
(October 27, 2000)

A
PROPOSAL
BY

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

TO PURCHASE A CONSERVATION EASEMENT
ON THE

MANLEY RANCH

(GRANITE AND POWELL COUNTIES)

Prepared by:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 2 Office
Attn: Mike Thompson (Wildlife Biologist)
3201 Spurgin Road
Missoula, MT 59804

INTRODUCTION

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) invites the public to comment on its proposal to acquire a conservation easement on approximately 4,636 acres of the Manley Ranch, in Granite and Powell Counties. FWP would provide a portion of the funding needed to purchase the proposed easement with an expenditure from its Habitat Montana Program. Completion of this project is contingent on FWP obtaining the remainder of the estimated purchase price of \$825,208 from third-party sources. FWP has applied for a grant of \$608,048 from the Montana Department of Justice Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP) for 3,416 acres of the proposed easement area within the Upper Clark Fork River Basin. NRDP final action on FWP's application is expected in December 2000. In addition, the Montana Agricultural Heritage Commission (MAHC) has granted \$135,000 toward FWP's purchase of this proposed easement, which is also contingent on full funding being arranged by the end of calendar year 2000. If NRDP and MAHC funds are secured, FWP's estimated expenditure would be \$82,160. The conservation easement would be purchased from The Conservation Fund, who has an agreement with the Manley Ranch to acquire the proposed easement.

The purposes of the conservation easement would be to prevent residential subdivision, development and other forms of habitat loss, perpetuate the ranching and logging lifestyle of the private landowner on the land under easement, and guarantee reasonable access for public hunting. The land under easement would remain in private ownership, and would remain on the counties' tax rolls. Traditional uses of the land would continue and generally would be unaffected by the easement. However, restrictions on potential changes in land use, rights granted to the public for access, and other terms of the conservation easement would endure in perpetuity, and be enforceable upon future owners of the property.

FWP and the Manley Ranch have selected the southernmost land block on the 16,000-acre ranch for the proposed conservation easement, including the Morris Creek drainage in the Upper Clark Fork River Basin and contiguous lands on the Blackfoot River side of the watershed divide. FWP and the Manley Ranch intend that this proposed easement on 4,636 acres will serve

to leverage grants from other funding entities to acquire similar conservation easements across the entire ranch over the next four years. However, such undefined future possibilities are beyond the scope of this assessment. FWP selected the subject lands as the location for the proposed easement because they encompass a distinct unit of wildlife habitat that provides linkage with other important wildlife seasonal ranges; therefore, it can stand on its own as a valuable project, even if future easement possibilities on the Manley Ranch do not materialize.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

Authorities/Direction

FWP is authorized by State law (87-1-209, MCA) to purchase conservation easements for protecting wildlife habitat. FWP funding for this proposal is provided from a portion of Montana hunting license revenues set aside to secure and manage lands as wildlife habitat (87-1-242, MCA), as enabled by the act of the 1987 Montana Legislature known as House Bill 526. The Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission (the Commission) is the decision-making authority for matters of acquiring conservation easements or other interests in land proposed by FWP. Through its Habitat Montana Policy (ARM 12.9.508-512), the Commission has directed FWP to deliver the following services and benefits with its acquisitions of conservation easements and other interests in wildlife habitat: (a) conserve and enhance land, water and wildlife; (b) contribute to hunting and fishing opportunities; (c) provide incentives for habitat conservation on private land; (d) contribute to non-hunting recreation; (e) protect open space and scenic areas; (f) promote habitat-friendly agriculture; and (g) maintain the local tax base. Following Commission approval of a proposed project, the Montana Board of Land Commissioners (the Land Board) must approve land acquisitions, disposals or exchanges involving FWP proposals over 100 acres or \$100,000 in value.

Area Description/Wildlife Resources


The Manley Ranch occupies a significant land area (16,000 acres) in the heart of a remote intermountain valley that covers some 300,000 acres between the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat Wilderness Areas, the Garnet Range, the Flints and Sapphires, and the Continental Divide. The

Manley Ranch spans the entire 7-mile breadth of valley bottom separating the East Garnet Range and West Garnet Range. It is positioned on the southwestern fringe of a fall staging area for upwards of 400 sandhill cranes from scattered breeding grounds all across the upper Blackfoot Valley, prior to their migration to the southwestern United States for the winter. It is part of the continental migration route for bald eagles between the Northwest Territories and southwest United States. Wolves have been documented across this area on a regular basis over the past 5 years, which is indicative of its natural linkage with distant regions of the Northern Rocky Mountains. The Manley Ranch is winter habitat for approximately 300 elk and 100 mule deer. Also, it is an area of spring/fall overlap for a second herd-unit of more than 500 elk that use the adjacent Meyer Ranch for much of the year. The immediate surrounding area is at the southern edge of occupied grizzly bear habitat, and occasional sightings are reported from nearby locations. The Manley Ranch supports an active bald eagle nest and a lek for Columbian Sharp-tailed Grouse (not on the subject property for the proposed conservation easement). Lynx occur in the general area, and pure-strain westslope cutthroat trout are verified in Morris Creek and other streams on the ranch.

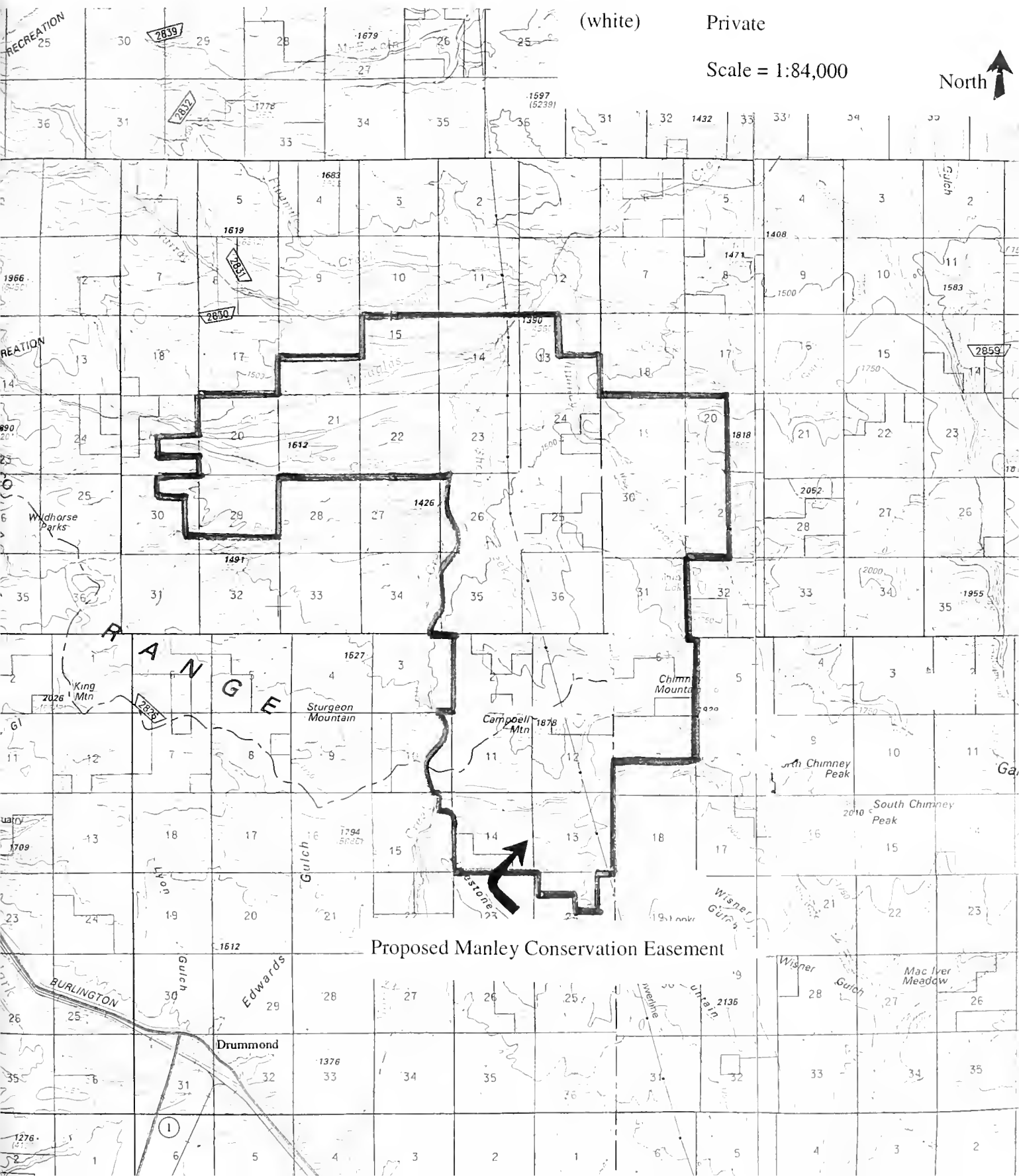
The southern and northern boundaries of the 16,000 contiguous acres of the Manley Ranch are located along the Drummond-Helmville Road (State Route 271), about 5 miles north of Drummond and 5 miles southwest of Helmville, respectively (Figure 1). The 4,636-acre portion of the ranch that is the subject of this proposal is located at the southern end of the ranch, almost equally divided between Granite and Powell Counties. This includes the origin of Elk Swamp Creek and a 4-mile reach in the headwaters of Morris Creek in the Clark Fork River drainage, and the origins of Sheep and Chimney Creeks in the Blackfoot River drainage. Prominent topographic features include Campbell Mountain (6,812 feet), the upper west slope of Chimney Mountain (6,400 feet at its highest elevation on the Manley Ranch) and Manley Mountain (5,980 feet). A legal description and map of the lands proposed for conservation are provided in Figures 2 and 3.

Upland vegetation is about 50% forest and 50% grassland. Forest types are Douglas-fir and lodgepole pine, grading into aspen and juniper. Grassland occurs in the form of expansive

Figure 1. Location of the proposed Manley Conservation Easement (area below the red dashed line) in relation to the rest of the Manley Ranch and surrounding features.

-  Manley Ranch property boundary
- (blue) State of Montana
- (yellow) U. S. Bureau of Land Management
- (white) Private

Scale = 1:84,000



Proposed Manley Conservation Easement

Figure 2. Legal description of lands proposed for inclusion in the Manley Conservation Easement, October 2000.

PARCEL 1:

LANDS LYING IN TOWNSHIP 11 NORTH, RANGE 11 WEST, P.M.M., Powell County:

Section 6: Lots 5, 6, 7, S1/2 NE1/4, SE1/4 NW1/4, E1/2 SW1/4, SE1/4

Section 7: Lots 1, 2, E1/2 NW1/4, NE1/4 (N1/2)

LANDS LYING IN TOWNSHIP 11 NORTH, RANGE 12 WEST, P.M.M., Powell and Granite Counties:

Section 1: S1/2 N1/2, S1/2

Section 2: S1/2 N1/2, S1/2

Section 10: E1/2, LESS AND EXCEPTING that portion which lies West of the dedicated county road as it now exists across such Section.

LESS AND EXCEPTING that portion deeded to the State of Montana, Department of Highways as described in Book 31 of Deeds at page 511 and 514. Recorded January 23, 1947.

Section 11: All

LANDS LYING IN TOWNSHIP 11 NORTH, RANGE 12 WEST, P.M.M., Granite County:

Section 12: W1/2 W1/2, E1/2 NW1/4, N1/2 NE1/4

Section 13: All

Section 14: All LESS AND EXCEPTING Certificate of Survey No. 305, Reference Document: Roll 32 of Microfilm, page 1031.

Section 24: N1/2 NW1/4, W1/2 NE1/4

PARCEL 2:

LANDS LYING IN TOWNSHIP 11 NORTH, RANGE 12 WEST, P.M.M., Granite County:

Section 12: E1/2 SW1/4, S1/2 NE1/4, SE1/4

Section 15: NE1/4 NE1/4

LESS AND EXCEPTING that portion deeded to the State of Montana, Department of Highways as described in Book 31 of Deeds at Page 514. Recorded January 23, 1947.

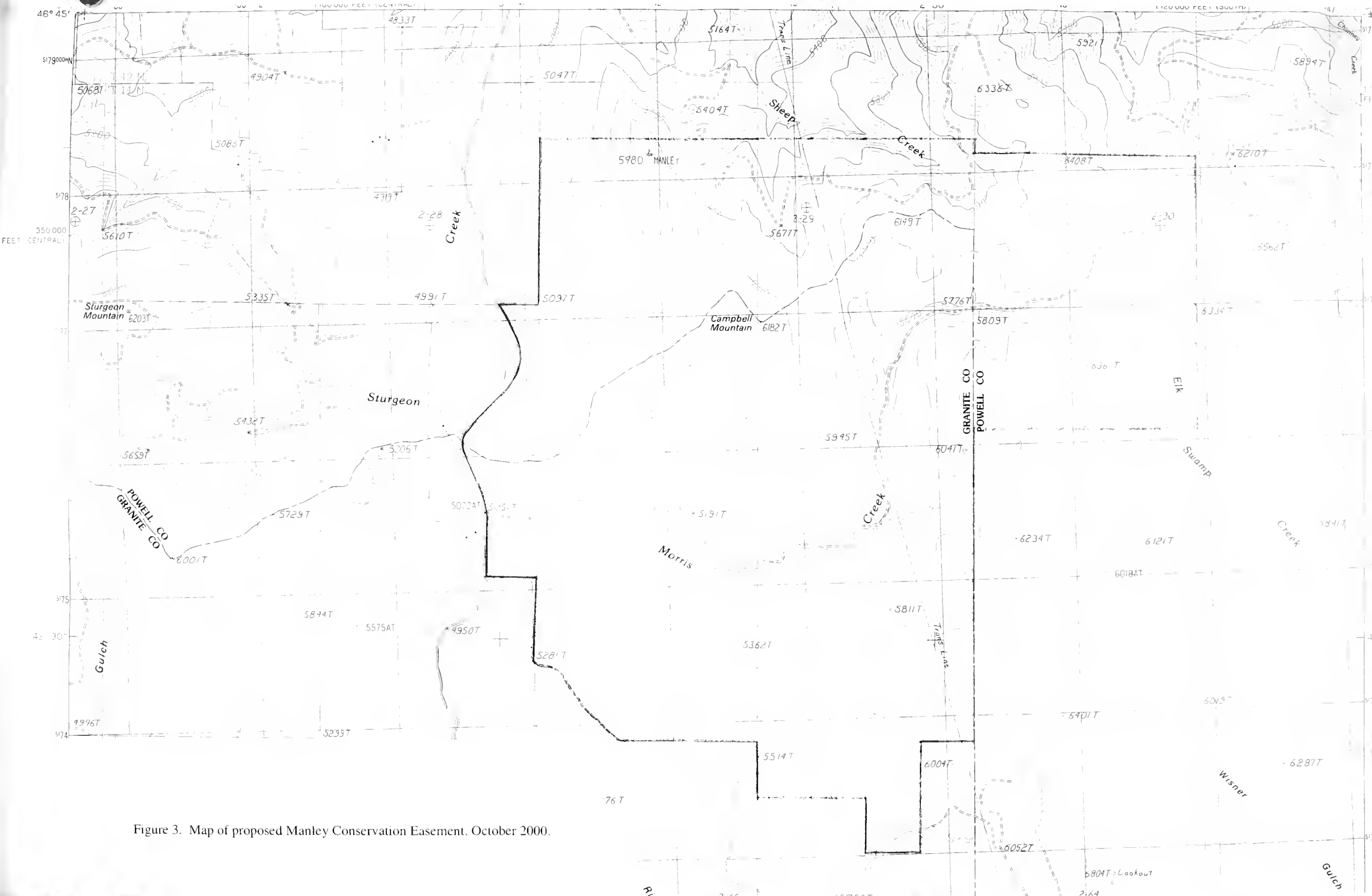


Figure 3. Map of proposed Manley Conservation Easement, October 2000.

native rangeland, as well as natural parks in otherwise forested habitats. Native rangelands are dominated by sagebrush, bluebunch wheatgrass and Idaho fescue. Parks are also vegetated with bunchgrasses, but sagebrush is variably reduced or absent. Noxious weeds, primarily spotted knapweed, are present near roads in scattered distribution and low density, and are being controlled by the landowner.

The property proposed for a conservation easement fronts State Route 271, beginning at the top of Drummond Canyon for a distance of 1.25 miles north toward Helmville. An unimproved ranch road departs from Route 271, following Morris Creek to Chimney Mountain. Another unimproved ranch road departs from Route 241 about 1.25 miles north of the project boundary and accesses the northeast slope of Manley Mountain across the northern edge of the property. There are no buildings or other structures besides an abandoned tin barn and cattle pasture fences on the land. The primary land uses during the past 100 years have been cattle grazing, logging and hunting, with public access controlled by the landowner.

Project Need

The Manley Ranch owners are at a decision point in their planning for passing the ranch on to the family heirs, and in keeping the ranch working as a viable economic operation. The family is interested in preventing subdivision and development of the property, and in replacing economic incentives to subdivide with economic incentives to leave the land undivided. The Ranch has an agreement with a non-profit organization known as The Conservation Fund (TCF) to accomplish this. The Manley Ranch intends to convey a conservation easement to TCF, and TCF would immediately assign the proposed conservation easement to FWP. FWP would then be responsible for maintaining communications and a working relationship with the Manley Ranch, and enforcing the terms of the easement.

FWP has long recognized the importance of the Manley Ranch as wildlife habitat, and as a desirable location to expand public access for hunting. FWP and the Manley Ranch have a history of cooperating on issues and opportunities such as establishment of a walk-in hunting

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area with other neighbors in 1977 (now defunct), as well as enhancement of fish habitat, research on a remnant sharp-tailed grouse population, and other joint ventures in the 1990s to the present time. Since the early 1990s, the Manley Ranch has been among the highest priorities of FWP Region 2 (Missoula) for acquisition of a conservation easement. Limited available funding and urgent needs to accomplish other important, time-sensitive projects all across Montana have prevented FWP from agreeing to purchase a conservation easement on the Manley Ranch prior to this time. Now, with the involvement of TCF, and with the advent of new possibilities for funding partnerships with the Montana Agricultural Heritage Commission and Natural Resource Damage Program for which the proposed Manley Ranch project appears to qualify, there is practical opportunity for FWP to purchase a conservation easement on the Manley Ranch.

This opportunity to acquire a conservation easement on approximately 4,636 acres of the Manley Ranch represents a timely coincidence of interests, priorities and funding among the private landowner, FWP and other project partners to perpetuate a traditional agricultural lifestyle and important wildlife habitat in perpetuity. Failure to act on this opportunity could make a conservation easement much more difficult to accomplish in the future as property values continue to rise and as the land passes to succeeding owners who may have different interests. The Manley Ranch is already bordered on the east by a 265-owner subdivision covering some 11,000 acres (average parcel size is 41 acres), and is bordered on the west by a smaller subdivision. If the land is sold, subdivided and developed, a unique, native wildlife habitat will be lost forever, along with the public's opportunities to access and appreciate that habitat. The potential replacement of native vegetation with houses, fences, driveways, garages, barns, and other structures constitutes a direct habitat loss for native wildlife populations. Human activity associated with residential areas, including vehicle traffic, pets and outdoor recreation, would displace many species from otherwise suitable habitat within an expanded radius around the homes. Conversely, the potential introduction of garbage, bird feeders, fruit trees and other unnatural foods would likely attract deer, bears and mountain lions into nuisance situations that would not occur without rural residential development, and are difficult and expensive to mitigate or correct.

Additionally, potential residential development on the lands proposed for a conservation easement would seriously decrease future hunting opportunities on those lands. Shooting restrictions would become a practical necessity within an extended radius surrounding the home sites to protect residents. As hunting is removed as a practical possibility on more and more acres in a rural setting, there would be increasing potential for wildlife, particularly elk, to habituate and seek refuge in areas closed to hunting. Experience has shown that this can prevent FWP from effectively managing elk population size to keep elk numbers in balance with natural forage and to control levels of private property damage caused by elk.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

FWP proposes to acquire a conservation easement on approximately 4,636 acres of the Manley Ranch. FWP would provide a portion of the funding needed to purchase the proposed easement with an expenditure from its Habitat Montana Program. Completion of this project is contingent on FWP obtaining the remainder of the estimated purchase price of \$825,208 from third-party sources. FWP has applied for a grant of \$608,048 from the Montana Department of Justice Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP) for 3,416 acres of the proposed easement area within the Upper Clark Fork River Basin. NRDP final action on FWP's application is expected in December 2000. In addition, the Montana Agricultural Heritage Commission (MAHC) has granted \$135,000 toward FWP's purchase of this proposed easement, which is also contingent on full funding being arranged by the end of calendar year 2000. If NRDP and MAHC funds are secured, FWP's estimated expenditure would be \$82,160. The conservation easement would be purchased from The Conservation Fund, who has an agreement with the Manley Ranch to acquire the proposed easement.

The proposed conservation easement would only affect the 4,636-acre portion of the ranchly described in the easement document (Figures 2 and 3), and would not affect the remaining 11,000 acres (approx.) of the Manley Ranch. This proposal would leave the land under easement in the ownership of the Manley Ranch, but would endure as a restriction on the

deed in perpetuity, binding all future owners of the subject land. The subject land would remain on the county tax rolls and the easement would not cause a reduction in tax revenues to Powell or Granite Counties.

The terms of the proposed conservation easement would prohibit any subdivision of the subject land for residential development or for any purposes other than agricultural. It would prohibit commercial uses (other than agriculture and forestry), surface mining, game farms, and other activities that might adversely impact the conservation values of the land. Ranching and forestry would be specifically allowed by the easement, in a manner generally consistent with traditional practices on the Manley Ranch, but with limitations to prevent abrupt changes in management practices that would seriously impact wildlife habitat (for example, sodbusting of native rangeland or clearcutting).

Under the terms of the conservation easement, the landowner and FWP would agree to a plan for livestock grazing and timber harvest. The conservation easement would set minimum standards that such livestock grazing and timber harvest activities must meet. A livestock grazing plan is included in the draft management plan that is attached to this environmental assessment. FWP anticipates making an expenditure of approximately \$27,000 for new fence construction to implement this plan in spring 2001. Timber harvest plans specific to the proposed conservation easement have not been prepared at this time, and would be submitted by the landowner and considered by FWP when specific forest management opportunities arise in the future. However, the landowner has prepared a Forest Stewardship Plan for the subject land (under the auspices of the Montana Forest Stewardship Program) in January 2000, which is appended to the draft management plan.

Public access for hunting would be guaranteed across the 4,636 acres under easement by a method agreed upon between FWP and the landowner that would provide reasonable opportunity for at least 350 hunter-days of recreation annually during the traditional fall hunting seasons. The strategy for managing public access on the subject lands in 2001 is part of the draft

management plan that is attached to this environmental assessment for public review.

As further described in the draft management plan, FWP would visit the easement area and the landowner each summer to monitor compliance with the easement terms and maintain communication. FWP would also increase its management and enforcement presence in the local area during hunting season to ensure that the public's rights to access under the terms of the easement are realized and that the agreed-upon access regulations are not violated.

ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION

Alternative A—No Action

FWP considered the alternative of taking no action. This would leave a full range of future management options for the subject lands, including development options, in the hands of current and future owners of the property. FWP would retain the option to comment on proposed land subdivisions and developments on the subject lands under existing laws and policies in Powell and Granite Counties; however, the effects of FWP's input on any future proposed subdivision are uncertain. Public access for hunting on the Manley Ranch would remain at the discretion of current and future landowners.

Alternatives Considered but Dropped from Further Consideration

Because the proposed conservation easement represents the full extent of agreement between FWP and the private landowner, "no-action" is the only reasonable alternative to the proposed action. The Manley Ranch is not for sale, so fee-title purchase of the property by FWP is not an option. FWP's preferred method for securing wildlife habitat is by conservation easement whenever appropriate because it leaves the land in private ownership and allows FWP to stretch limited available dollars. FWP and the landowner are discussing the possibility of future conservation easements that might bring more of the 16,000-acre Manley Ranch under easement in the future. However, FWP and potential funding partners have not committed sufficient funds to the Manley project to propose more than the 4,600-acre project at this time. A separate environmental assessment will be prepared and public review will be solicited if FWP

proposes to acquire another conservation easement on the Manley Ranch in the future.

IMPACTS

Neither the proposed action nor alternative A would have any effect on the following concerns:

Solid/hazardous wastes

Water rights

Mineral resources

Wild and scenic rivers

Floodplains

Air and Water Quality

The proposed action would likely result in a net reduction in potential future risks to air and water quality on the subject lands, compared to no action. Possibilities for residential, commercial, and industrial developments would be reduced and restricted across the subject land. Such developments, which would remain a possibility under the no-action alternative, would have the potential for affecting air and water quality in numerous ways. For example, increased roading and traffic on roads to service housing or commercial developments could increase runoff from road surfaces into Morris Creek. Potential effects of the rest-rotation grazing allowed in the proposed action would not differ measurably from the current situation. However, the proposed action would avoid the possibility of increased cattle use in and beside Morris Creek under different land ownership in the future, which would not be controlled under the no-action alternative. Similarly, effects of timber harvests allowed in the proposed easement would not differ from the current situation, but would prevent increased sedimentation that might occur as a result of timber harvests under the direction of future landowners if no action is taken.

Threatened and Endangered Species

The gray wolf is classified by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service as an endangered species, and may be present occasionally on the subject lands. At this time, no wolves have

established a consistent use pattern that includes the subject lands. Future recovery of wolves in this area will largely depend on prey populations (deer and elk) and conflicts with human activities. The proposed action would better protect prey populations of elk and mule deer than no action, and would lead to the lowest future increase in human settlement, development and potential conflicts with wolves.

Grizzly bears, a threatened species, may occasionally cross the property, but as with the wolf, grizzly bears have not established a consistent use pattern on the Manley Ranch. Suitable habitat for lynx, another threatened species, exists in forested habitats on the subject lands, but the presence of lynx has not been confirmed. Bald eagles nest about 4 miles north, but the subject lands are probably not important to this threatened species due to a lack of adequate aquatic foraging habitat. In all cases, the proposed action would be expected to benefit threatened and endangered wildlife in the long run by maintaining native plant communities and preventing residential or other land developments. The proposed conservation easement would not introduce any land use or activity that would be detrimental to these species.

No other federally listed threatened or endangered species are known or expected to occur on or within the affected area of the proposed action.

Sensitive Species

Pure-strain, westslope cutthroat trout occur in Morris Creek. This is thought to be an isolated population, native to the headwaters of Morris Creek on the subject lands. Juvenile fish may occasionally disperse downstream to the Clark Fork River during high water periods, but the lower reaches of Morris Creek, below the Manley Ranch to Drummond, are probably too heavily impacted to support an upstream spawning migration. The rest-rotation grazing program prescribed in the draft proposed action would be expected to maintain or improve streambank structure and vegetation over the long-term on the subject lands. The no-action alternative would not protect the Morris Creek headwaters from potential future degradation. Fishing pressure, which currently is low to nonexistent on Morris Creek, would not be affected by the proposed

action, and would not increase potential fishing-caused stress on cutthroat trout.

Sharp-tailed grouse, possibly of the Columbian subspecies, are present on the Manley Ranch, but not known to occur on the subject lands where marginally suitable habitat exists. No other sensitive animal or plant species are known or suspected to occur on the subject lands. The proposed action offers protection from habitat loss for sensitive and other native plant and animal species collectively, while the no-action alternative does not.

Wildlife Habitat

Alternative A (no action) would leave an important portion of the habitat and local wildlife populations vulnerable to the management decisions of future private landowners who might not consider objectives that feature wildlife or the general public interest in wildlife. Changes in management direction, such as subdivision and sale of residential lots for development, would negatively impact native wildlife through direct removal of natural habitat on homesites, along roadways, and elsewhere within the daily use area of people and pets. Indirect effects include disturbance of wildlife across a wider area around homes due to an increase in human recreational activity. Wildlife species diversity would be expected to decline as species associated with human residential areas increase and species sensitive to disturbance are displaced. Elk and deer would likely be displaced onto adjacent private lands, increasing the currently high amount of game damage on private property and costs to FWP of addressing these issues. The introduction of dog food, garbage, bird feeders, pets and other attractants in this presently remote habitat would probably attract black bears, mountain lions and potentially grizzly bears to residences, ultimately increasing mortality in these species as they become viewed as pests. The proposed action would prevent these and other forms of wildlife habitat loss on the subject lands.

Wetlands and Riparian Habitats

The proposed action includes the origin of Elk Swamp Creek and a 4-mile reach in the headwaters of Morris Creek in the Clark Fork River drainage, and the origins of Sheep and

Chimney Creeks in the Blackfoot River drainage. The subject lands do not contain wetlands (i.e., marshy habitats extending beyond the edge of a stream, beyond what would normally be considered a riparian zone). Under the proposed action, riparian habitat would be included among the conservation values of the land to be protected from damage. Thus, the current condition of the riparian zone would be documented in photographs and serve as a baseline for comparison in the future. The landowner and FWP would be accountable to ensure that this riparian condition is maintained or enhanced. Rest-rotation grazing, which is prescribed by the landowner and would be part of the proposed conservation easement, is expected to maintain or improve streambank and riparian vegetation conditions in the long run. The no-action alternative offers no protection for these riparian areas.

Hunting Access and Elk Population Management

The proposed action would ensure opportunity for at least 350 hunter-days access each year for public hunting during the traditional fall hunting seasons. Substantially higher hunting pressure over a 90-day hunting period would reduce the quality of the hunting experience and the probability of achieving an effective annual elk harvest necessary for meeting FWP elk population objectives. The no-action alternative would allow a future landowner(s) to close the land to public hunting, which would result in a loss of valued access to remote, natural habitat. It might also lead to a reduced opportunity for effective elk harvest, which would exacerbate current game damage problems on private lands in the Drummond-Helmville area.

Livestock grazing

The proposed conservation easement would allow--but would not require--continued livestock grazing. If grazing occurs, as expected under current ownership, a rest-rotation formula would be followed, as described in the proposed conservation easement and management plan. Livestock grazing would be unrestricted under the no-action alternative.

Economies

Over the long-run, Alternative A (no action) would allow greater potential residential and

commercial growth in this rural area. This possible future growth would be accompanied by higher demand for utilities, roads, schools and other services that would have to be partially or wholly provided by state and local governments. As developments achieved their potential growth limits under Alternative A, the recreational and economic benefits generated by the existence of abundant and diverse wildlife and natural landscapes in the local area would be diminished. Conversely, the proposed action would restrict future residential and commercial developments on the subject lands, in a location that would allow wildlife to continue to flourish, and in a rural setting where wildlife populations may be managed effectively. The scenic viewshed would be preserved by the proposed action, which may translate into a minor, long-term economic benefit to land values of surrounding properties. The proposed action would not affect the tax base of the local counties.

Neighboring Landowners and Local Community

The proposed action could influence landowners bordering the conservation easement via long-term impacts on property values. Property values on lands bordering the conservation easement may be higher because the easement lands will remain dominated by open space and effective as wildlife habitat. Otherwise, the general effects of this proposal, as felt by neighbors of the Manley Ranch on a day-to-day basis, would be status quo. FWP would continue to attempt to control elk population size (by hunting) to match available natural habitat and minimize damage to private crops and fences. The no-action alternative would allow the possibility of dramatic changes in land use on the Manley property in the future, which could change the character of the local community.

Historic and Cultural Resources

Four cultural sites on the subject lands are identified in the State Heritage Database. The proposed action would not cause a change in land use, so would not affect cultural sites. Potential developments allowable under the no-action alternative would leave cultural resources at risk.

Cumulative Impacts

Alternative A (no action) could ultimately contribute to the cumulative regional and local loss of wildlife habitat and public access if the subject lands on the Manley Ranch are eventually managed in a manner incompatible with these values. Further, no-action could ultimately contribute slightly to the cumulative regional and local loss of grazing land for the livestock industry, and an increasing cumulative demand for services provided by local county and state governments to new residences. The proposed action would not be expected to contribute to a cumulative impact in a measurable way.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A formal scoping process is not normally part of FWP's public involvement process for developing project proposals under its Habitat Montana Program. However, FWP has benefited from public input in advance of this environmental assessment.

FWP attended meetings of the Granite County Commissioners (May 30, 2000) and Powell County Commissioners (September 29, 2000) to provide information and solicit input. The Granite County Commissioners followed up with a letter dated August 15, 2000 to American Public Land Exchange Company (representing the Manley Ranch), indicating that "this Board has no objection to the Manley Ranch Conservation Easement as it was presented." The Commissioners cautioned that elk should be managed in a way "that would not be a burden for adjoining land owners." During the meeting with the Powell County Commission, members advised that the county tax base should be maintained and that the terms of the conservation easement should reflect the landowner's wishes. FWP responded that this advice would be followed and is inherent in FWP's Habitat Montana Program statewide. The Powell County Commissioners also made FWP aware of its interest in a small gravel site along the roadside on the Manley Ranch, and additional right-of-way to straighten the county road.

FWP discussed the proposal with the North Powell (September 11, 2000) and Granite County Conservation Districts (October 9, 2000). The North Powell District advised that

flexibility be preserved in stipulations for grazing livestock, which supported FWP's rationale for addressing the specifics of pasture locations and grazing rotation dates in the easement management plan (a "living" document that can be amended by mutual consent) rather than the recorded easement document. The Granite County District was interested primarily in the public access terms of the proposed easement, and generally supported the proposal to provide access by foot or horseback from a parking area on the easement land, without having to bother the landowner for permission. A suggestion was made that some provision for limited motorized access to accommodate disabled hunters would be appreciated.

During the course of applying for supplemental grants to fund the proposed project in calendar year 2000, FWP and representatives of the Manley Ranch also have discussed the proposal with numerous individuals and entities, including the Montana Forest Stewardship Committee and Forest Legacy Subcommittee, the Montana Agricultural Heritage Commission, the Montana Natural Resource Damage Program, the Upper Clark Fork River Basin Advisory Council, the Western Montana Fish and Game Association, Montana Trout Unlimited, Big Sky Upland Bird Association, Anaconda Sportsmen's Club, Montana Wildlife Federation, Montana Forestland Services, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Five Valleys Land Trust. Most of these discussions were in the context of soliciting support or addressing application requirements for the funding sought, but awareness of issues and opportunities was raised on the part of FWP and the entities FWP consulted with. A supplemental grant of \$135,000 was awarded by the Montana Agricultural Heritage Commission, contingent upon approval for other necessary funding to complete the entire proposed 4,600-acre project.

Formal public review of the draft environmental assessment (EA), including a draft socio-economic assessment and management plan, will begin with the availability of these documents on November 1, 2000, and will close on November 30, 2000. The availability of this EA for public review will be advertised in the local, Missoula-area, and statewide media, and a copy of the draft EA will be mailed to all parties who indicate an interest in this proposal. A public hearing will be held at the Helmville Community Center on November 13, 2000 at 6:30 P.M.

After reviewing public input received on or before November 30, FWP will decide upon a preferred alternative. The Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission will be asked to render a final decision on this proposal at its regularly scheduled meeting in December 2000. The State Board of Land Commissioners will be asked to approve the proposal at its meeting scheduled for December 18, 2000.

Comments should be addressed to Mike Thompson; Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks; 3201 Spurgin Road; Missoula, MT 59804 (phone 406-542-5523; email mthompson@state.mt.us). Comments must be postmarked no later than November 30, 2000 to ensure their consideration in the decision-making process.

AGENCIES, GROUPS OR OTHERS CONSULTED IN PREPARATION OF THE EA

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

Karen Hillstrom, Land Agent, Helena

Martha Williams, Legal Counsel, Helena

Steve Knapp, Habitat Bureau Chief, Wildlife Division, Helena

John Firebaugh, Regional Wildlife Manager, Missoula

Dan Hook, Wildlife Biologist, Anaconda

Mike Frisina, Range Coordinator, Butte

Paul Sihler, Field Services Administrator, Helena

Don Childress, Wildlife Division Administrator, Helena

Eric Reiland, Fisheries Biologist, Missoula

Manley Ranch

Janet and Tracey Manley, Owners/Operators, Helmville

Mark Sommer, American Public Land Exchange, Missoula

Bruce Bugbee, American Public Land Exchange, Missoula

The Conservation Fund

Mark Elsbree, Northwest Representative, Sun Valley, Idaho

U. S. Bureau of Land Management

Dave McCleerey, Wildlife Biologist, Missoula

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Greg Neudecker, Wildlife Biologist, Great Falls

Montana Forestland Services, PLLC

John Wells, ACF, Bonner

Montana Natural Heritage Program, Helena

State Historic Preservation Office, Helena

PERSONS RESPONSIBLE FOR PREPARING THE EA

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region 2

Mike Thompson, Wildlife Biologist, Missoula

NEED FOR AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Based on an evaluation of impacts to the physical and human environment, under MEPA, the proposed action is not a significant action affecting the human environment; therefore, an environmental impact statement is not a necessary level of review.

Manley Conservation Easement MANAGEMENT PLAN

INTRODUCTION

FWP intends to acquire a conservation easement on the Manley Ranch from The Conservation Fund. FWP's purpose for acquiring the conservation easement, as stated in the easement document, is to "preserve and protect in perpetuity the conservation values of the land, particularly the habitat the land provides for a variety of wildlife species, and to prevent any use that will interfere with the conservation values of the land." By this conservation easement, FWP acknowledges the contributions of the traditional ranch operation toward the wildlife habitat that FWP recognizes as exceptional today and intends to perpetuate.

This management plan serves as a flexible link between rigid easement terms intended to endure in perpetuity and changeable conditions and situations on the land. It is a living document, to be reviewed annually by FWP and the landowner, and to be revised as needed upon agreement of both parties. Its function is to document strategies for land management in which FWP and the Manley Ranch are cooperating to ensure consistency with the terms and intent of the conservation easement. The principal strategy will be a protocol for annual meetings with the landowner and field monitoring of compliance with easement terms. Additionally, this management plan will address strategies for controlling noxious weeds, managing forested habitats, and allowing the public access guaranteed in this easement. Finally, this document includes the draft grazing plan required by the easement terms before livestock may be grazed on the land.

AREA DESCRIPTION

The Manley Ranch is a working cattle ranch that occupies a significant land area (16,000 acres) in the heart of a remote intermountain valley that covers some 300,000 acres between the Bob Marshall and Scapegoat Wilderness Areas, the Garnet Range, the Flints and Sapphires, and the Continental Divide. The Manley Ranch spans the entire 7-mile breadth of valley bottom separating the East Garnet Range and the West Garnet Range. It is positioned on the southwestern fringe of a fall staging area for upwards of 400 sandhill cranes from scattered breeding grounds all across the upper Blackfoot Valley. It is part of the continental migration route for bald eagles between the Northwest Territories and southwest United States. Wolves have been documented across this area on a regular basis over the past 5 years, which is indicative of its natural linkage with distant regions of the Northern Rocky Mountains. On a more local scale, it is an area of overlap for at least two distinct population units of migratory mule deer and elk, and forms a connection between winter and summer ranges.

The Manley Conservation Easement will pertain to the southernmost 4,636-acre (approx.) portion of the Manley Ranch, located in Granite and Powell Counties. A legal description and map are displayed in the easement document. The easement area spans the watershed divide between the Clark Fork and Blackfoot Rivers. Vegetation is a complex of native bunchgrass, riparian, aspen, sagebrush, Rocky Mountain juniper (associated with rock outcrops) and Douglas-fir/lodgepole

pine vegetation types that have never been plowed. The 3.5-mile length of the Morris Creek headwaters forms the dominant drainage feature in the easement area.

BASELINE INVENTORY

The existing features and conditions on the Manley Conservation Easement at the time it is established would be described, photographed and documented in a baseline inventory. The purpose of the baseline inventory is to establish an objective and reliable basis from which to assess changes on the land over time. FWP would contract with a qualified consultant to prepare this document. FWP and the landowner would cooperate in providing all pertinent information to the consultant, and in signing the final baseline inventory when both parties agree it is an accurate and complete representation of all pertinent conditions on the land.

ANNUAL MONITORING

FWP and the Manley Ranch would begin a written record of annual easement monitoring, beginning in 2001. In 1999 and 2000, FWP contracted with a qualified, independent consultant to conduct one monitoring visit per year for all of its conservation easements across Montana. Each visit is arranged with prior notice for a time that is convenient for the landowner. The contractor uses a checklist to ensure that all pertinent easement terms are discussed with the landowner, and provides an opportunity for the landowner to present any issues or concerns for the record. An inspection of the property is always part of the monitoring visit. The contractor makes a special effort to photograph sites of current interest and to replicate photos from photopoints established in the baseline inventory. The contractor's annual monitoring report objectively documents any areas of misunderstanding or

noncompliance with easement terms. It is left to FWP and the landowner to address any problems identified by the monitoring consultant. In the case of the Manley Conservation Easement, FWP's regional liaison would accompany the contractor and meet with the landowner during annual monitoring, which would be scheduled for ½-day in midsummer.

FWP and the Manley Ranch agree to cooperate in this manner to maintain communication and document compliance with easement terms, with the assistance of a qualified, independent consultant. FWP's regional liaison (the wildlife biologist based in Anaconda) will also be available to the landowner between monitoring visits to discuss management issues and share information.

NOXIOUS-WEED MANAGEMENT

The spread of existing noxious weed species and the introduction and establishment of new exotic species are among the greatest risks to native plant communities and wildlife habitat across Montana. Currently, noxious weeds (primarily spotted knapweed) are scattered near roads on the proposed Manley easement area, but occur at low densities due to an active weed management program practiced by the landowner. With continued effort, the densities and distributions of existing weed occurrences can be kept under control, at or below baseline levels. The Manley Ranch intends to continue its current weed control program to meet this objective.

The Ranch also plans to continue inventorying the easement area annually for new weed occurrences by inspecting roadways, cowpaths, game trails and other disturbed sites where weeds are likely to enter the property first. Any new species occurrences would be reported to the local

county weed district and FWP, and the landowner would promptly attempt to eradicate these spot occurrences by the most efficient and effective means available. Key factors that could minimize the long-term vulnerability of the land to weed establishment and persistence are already incorporated in traditional grazing practices on the ranch, and would be controlled by the terms of the conservation easement. The Manley Ranch plans to continue managing the land in a manner that avoids impacts from noxious weeds and favors vigorous and competitive communities of desirable plant species.

FOREST MANAGEMENT

The Manley Ranch Conservation Easement allows an appropriate range of silvicultural options for the landowner to manage forest stands and, if desired, realize an income from sustainable timber harvest. Such forest management activities must fall within limits and meet objectives set forth in the easement document, which will ensure that forests on the easement area will continue to function as effective wildlife habitat. The easement requires the landowner to submit a forest management plan for FWP's review and approval before timber harvest activities may occur to ensure that forest management objectives in the easement are addressed. Such forest management plans would include the following information:

- a timber harvest map;
- a description of the condition and structure of the proposed timber harvest unit(s) prior to harvest;
- the objectives of the proposed timber harvest;
- timber marking guidelines;
- access considerations, including road/trail construction and reconstruction, mitigation of impacts to

soil and streams, and seeding of roads, trails and landings;

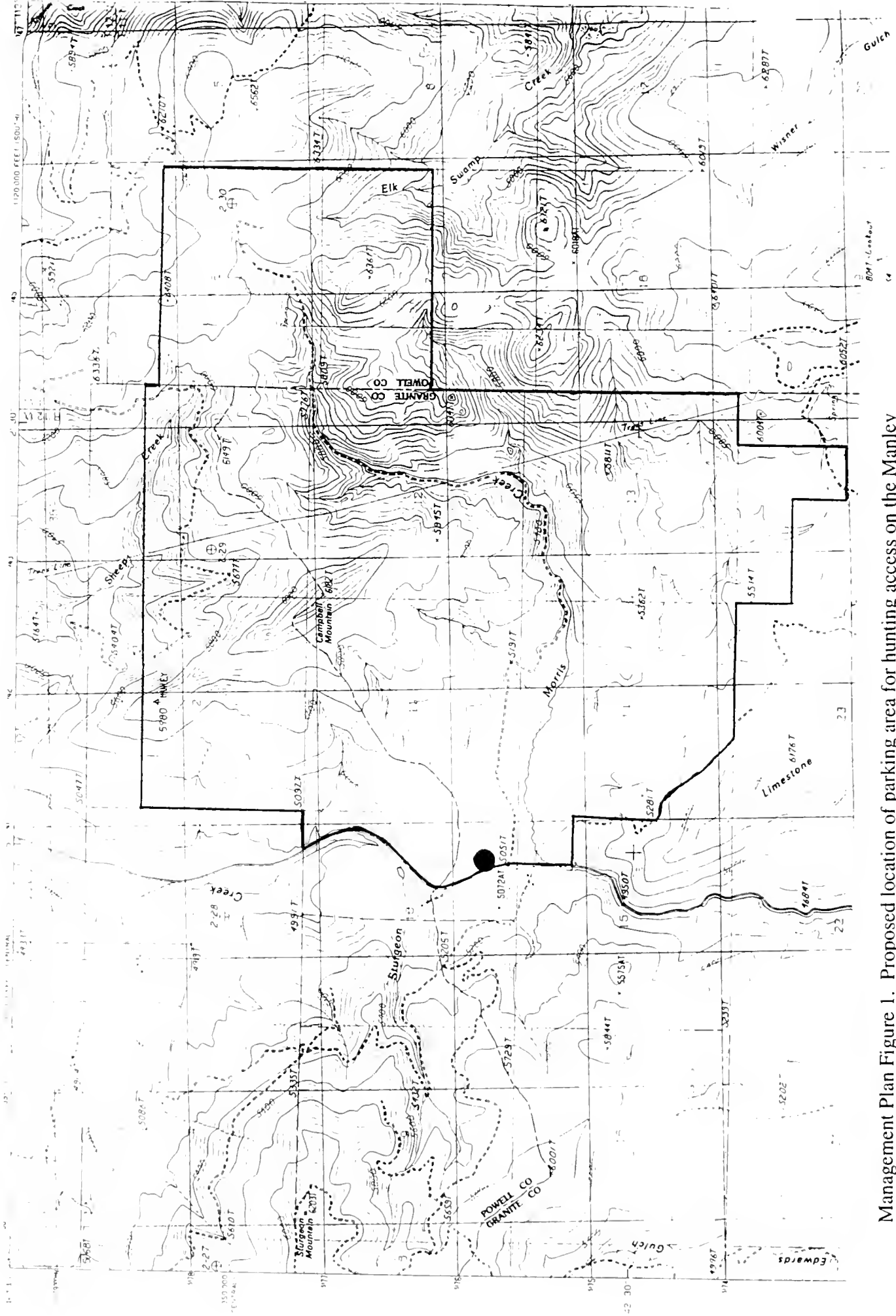
- season of operations;
- method(s) of slash treatment;
- equipment types to be used;

Forest stands on the easement area have been harvested previously. It is FWP's understanding that the current landowner has no plans to harvest more timber in the near future. However, the easement terms and this approval process leave options open for the landowner to manage forest stands if conditions change. In January 2000, the Ranch prepared a Forest Stewardship Plan (under the auspices of the Montana Forest Stewardship Program) for the subject lands. This preliminary plan is attached for reference.

PUBLIC ACCESS MANAGEMENT

The Manley Ranch Conservation Easement guarantees opportunity for at least 350 hunter-days of access annually across the 4,600-acre easement area during the fall hunting season. For the 2001 hunting season, hunting access would be managed in general accordance with the contingency option provided in the easement document. Hunters would not be required to ask permission to hunt from the landowner. Instead, hunters would be provided with a designated parking area that will be located along the Drummond-Helmville Road, as shown in Figure 1. FWP will accept responsibility for constructing and maintaining the parking lot, after coordinating with the landowner on details of design and siting. In 2001, the parking area would be open to the public for hunting access every day from October 1-January 1.

The parking area will allow trucks towing 2-horse trailers room to turn around and pull into each of 3 parking spaces in the lot. When the 3 parking spaces are full (i.e.,



Management Plan Figure 1. Proposed location of parking area for hunting access on the Manley Conservation Easement.

when 3 vehicles are parked in the lot), the public's right to access the Manley Conservation Easement is fully exercised. People who arrive at the Manley easement area and find 3 vehicles parked in the parking area will not be allowed to access the easement area until a parking space opens up. Although this rule will not prevent the general public from pulling off the county road, parking in such a manner will not constitute an allowable means of exercising the right of public access granted in the Manley Conservation Easement.

To prevent people from excluding others access to the easement area, vehicles will only be allowed to occupy the parking area between the hours of 5:00 A.M. and 10:00 P.M. Camping, picnicking, or loitering in the parking lot are prohibited. Vehicles driven by the landowner, landowner's family members, partners and employees will not occupy parking spaces in the parking area.

Upon obtaining legal access to the Manley Conservation Easement by parking in a designated space in the parking area, and prior to proceeding on the easement area, the public must sign in at a sign-in box posted and maintained by FWP onsite. The public is also required to review the regulations and map printed in brochures, which will be available at the sign-in box, and carry a copy as a permit to access the easement area. After signing-in and obtaining a brochure/permit, the public may proceed upon the easement area by foot or horseback. Motorized vehicles or mountain bikes are prohibited. For the landowner's protection, fires will be prohibited.

The information presented above describes the substance of a draft agreement between FWP and the landowner on the method by which the public could realize the right to

access the Manley Conservation Easement. Nothing in this access agreement should be misconstrued to restrict the amount of access the landowner would be allowed to grant on the easement area. For example, the landowner would retain the right to operate motorized vehicles on the easement area, and to allow others to operate vehicles on roads, or access the land from locations outside the parking area. When the Manley Ranch gives permission to individuals for access privileges that extend beyond those granted the general public, the Ranch would do so in writing, using permission slips provided by FWP.

The usual fall hunting seasons currently offered by FWP for which the Manley Ranch provides legitimate hunting opportunity include fall black bear, rifle season for elk (including the district 298 season that opens October 1) and deer, archery for elk and deer (after October 1), and mountain grouse. In addition, the Ranch intends to allow reasonable public access for holders of antlerless-elk permits throughout the extended elk management season in Hunting District 291, which ends on January 1. Under current hunting season regulations, it is understood and agreed that the Landowner retains sole discretion to regulate public access to hunt mountain lion and bobcat for those portions of the winter hound-hunting seasons that extend beyond January 1, and black bear and turkey in spring. The Landowner also retains sole discretion to regulate public access for trapping, fishing, coyote and "gopher" shooting.

FWP anticipates that the public will display their gratitude for the right of public access granted by the Manley family by following rules and respecting private property. Actions to the contrary, such as littering or efforts to circumvent access rules will not be

tolerated. Easement terms specifically reserve the right for FWP or the landowner to deny access to individuals for cause.

GRAZING PLAN

Terms in the Manley Conservation Easement require FWP and the landowner to agree on and follow a rest-rotation grazing plan that blends ranch objectives with the purposes and requirements of the easement. Minimum requirements that must be met by the grazing plan are presented in the easement document. Following is the draft grazing plan agreed upon between the Manley Ranch and FWP, which would implement the grazing system devised by the landowner and adjusted to meet FWP easement specifications. The plan would be implemented in June 2001, and followed thereafter.

The existing pasture configuration and additions/changes that would be made in the spring of 2001 to accommodate this grazing plan are shown in Figure 2. The entire ranch area, including lands outside the easement area, are shown as needed to account for the needs of livestock and the ranch operation on a year-round basis. Once a grazing system is designed and agreed upon that fits the entire ranch operation, then the allowable rotation of livestock across the portion of the land under easement is merely a part of the larger, functioning system, requiring no exceptional consideration by the landowner.

Cattle would be moved through the pastures as shown in the grazing formula in Table 1. The portion of the formula pertaining directly to the easement area of the Ranch is the portion addressing summer-fall (early June to November) pastures (Table 1). It is essential that cattle be moved through the various summer-fall pastures and

grazing/rest treatments in the sequence prescribed in Table 1. Cattle would not be moved into the seed-ripe pasture prior to early August. Seed-ripe would key on bluebunch wheatgrass in the upper elevation portion of each pasture. Each year, cattle would begin the grazing season in the pasture rested the previous year. Each year at seed-ripe time, cattle would be placed in the pasture grazed from early June to seed-ripe the previous year. Each year, the pasture scheduled for yearlong rest would have been grazed by cattle from seed-ripe through October the previous year.

Photopoints and other standard monitoring practices may be implemented to monitor the effects of the grazing system on native vegetation. Monitoring compliance with the grazing formula will be main priority. Mutually agreed-upon adjustments, within the context of rest-rotation grazing, will be considered with the landowner as needed.

FWP and the landowner would make fencing improvements in time to implement the grazing system in June 2001. To fully implement the grazing system, 3.5 miles of new barbed wire fence would be constructed. The fence to separate Pasture 1 from Pasture 2 (1.5 miles) would receive priority for construction (complete by late June 2001). The remaining 2 miles of fence would be constructed by late June 2002. This fence construction schedule would allow the landowner to implement the grazing formula in 2001. The total cost for range improvements is estimated at \$27,000, which FWP will provide.

If additional lands located north of the currently proposed easement area are placed under easement in the future, the grazing system will be coordinated with this proposal.

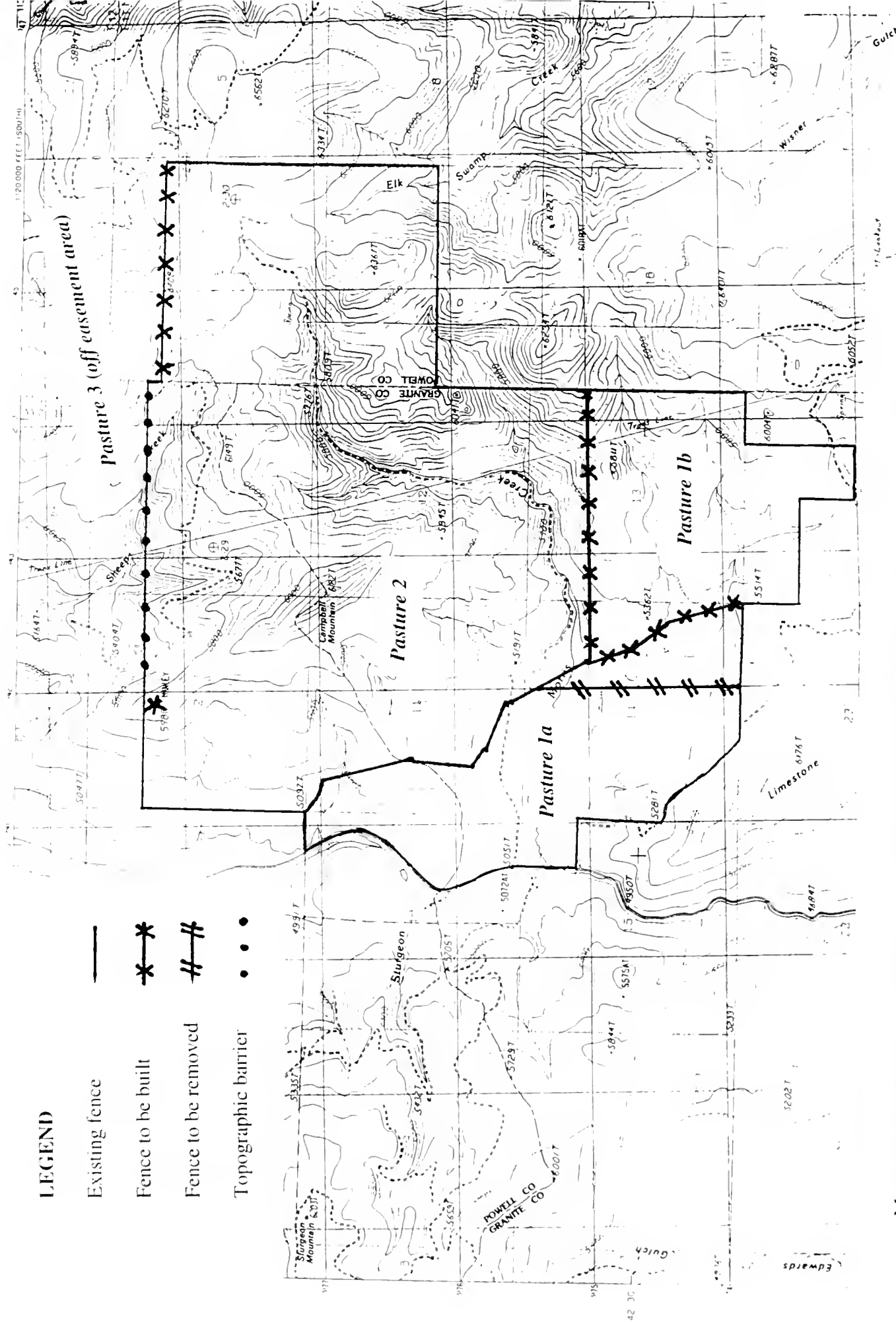
Table 1. Livestock grazing formula for implementing a rest-rotation grazing system on the Manley Conservation Easement.

Livestock Grazing Formula

| Grazing Seasons* | Pastures 1a + 1b (South pastures in Easement Area)** | Pasture 2 (North pasture in Easement Area) | Pasture 3 (off Easement Area) |
|--|--|--|----------------------------------|
| 2001 (Year One) | A | B | *** |
| 2002 (Year Two) | B | C | *** |
| 2003 (Year Three) | C | A | *** |
| <i>*Year Four the rotation is started over by referring to Year One</i> | | | |
| <i>**Refer to map on Figure 2</i> | | | |
| <i>***Pasture 3, located off the easement area, will be solely the landowner's responsibility</i> | | | |
| A = livestock grazing allowed from early June to seed-ripe (seed-ripe occurs during early August. Livestock may be kept in this pasture through October, at landowner's discretion); B = livestock grazing begins no sooner than seed-ripe (early August) and may continue through October; C = rested from livestock grazing yearlong | | | |

LEGEND

- Existing fence
- Fence to be built
- Fence to be removed
- Topographic barrier



Management Plan Figure 2. Proposed locations of pastures in rest-rotation grazing system on the Manley Conservation Easement.

FOREST STEWARDSHIP PLAN

Prepared by: MSU Extension Forestry
For: Montana Forest Stewardship Program
All Rights Reserved - Written Permission Needed To Copy

Authors

This Stewardship Plan was completed by:

Landowner Name(s): Manley Ranch, Janet & John Manley
(or representative)

Mailing Address: 1153 Hwy 271
Drummond, MT 59832

Date of Completion: 1/27/2000

Property Ownership

Owner(s) of Record: Manley Ranch, Janet & John Manley

Legal Description: phase I

Total Acreage: 3780 acres

County: Granite & Powell Counties

Record of Certification

Reviewed by a Forest Stewardship Advisor representing the Montana Forest Stewardship Program.

Stewardship Advisor Name: John E. Wells, ACF

Date of Property Visit: 1/27/2000

Stewardship Advisor Signature: [Signature]

Forest Landowner(s) Signature(s): Janet Manley

John T Manley

Property History

A brief description of ownership record, past management activities, and development of the ownership.
(Based on personal knowledge, property records, and local information sources.)

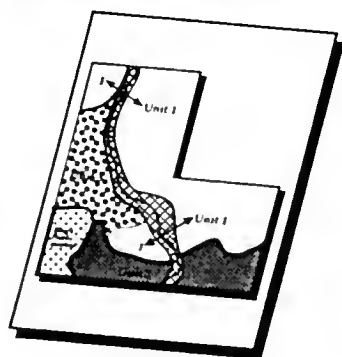
Sheep + Cattle continuous since about 1900
1975 - Clearcut of lodgepole pine in Stolp Park (MUS)
1978-80 - Selective cut on south side of Morris Creek
1956-58 - Tree Farmers - remove all big Douglas fir and
Ponderosa Pine - Road built up creek
1996-97 - Selective cut of MU7
1999 - selective cut of MU1

Forest Stewardship Goals

The principal management objectives for the ownership.
(Refer to worksheet Goals for my Forest Land.)

1. Keep Manley Ranch as a working ranch + forest in the family
2. For future generations.
3. Maintain an economically viable ranch unit
4. Prevent subdivision
- 5.
6. Sell conservation easement to accomplish goals 1-4
7. Maintain a healthy + productive rangeland
8. Maintain a healthy forest stands
9. Continue to provide suitable habitat for
10. wildlife.

Number of Management Units



Management Units are subdivisions of the ownership based on:

- Type of Vegetation
- Physical Characteristics
- Constrained Areas
- Management Convenience
- Common Resource Objectives

Number of Management Units: 10

Management Unit Description

Management Unit (MU) description based on Stewardship Inventory.



Tree Species:

PRIMARY

DF

SECONDARY

PD

Forest Structure:

| Structure # | % of plots |
|-------------|------------|
| 8 | 80 |
| 9 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 |
| | |

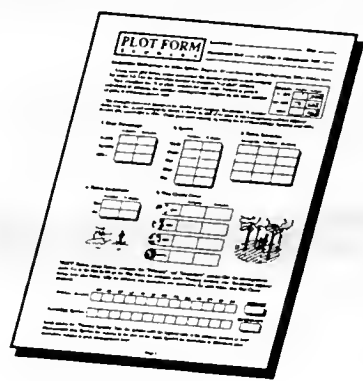


General Description of the MU unique features, special considerations, etc.

DF Forest on moderate North aspect slopes Overstory removed in 1999 adjacent to County Road

2. Stewardship Potential and Limitations

Using the Plot Form Summary and handout What My Plot Information Tells Me, describe the potential and limitations for each forest resource below.



Forested Range resource:

Potential: Open canopy, presence of desirable/preferred grass, north aspect will provide good available forage.

Limitations: Noxious weeds may limit forage if left untreated.

Wildlife resource:

Potential: Good elk + deer forage present.

Limitations: Proximity to County Road. Noxious weeds. Little or no thermal cover. No snags.

Timber resource:

Potential: Moderate slopes, easy access, north aspect make this a readily managed unit

Limitations: Recent logging removed nearly all merchantable timber. Next harvest will be in 7-10 years

Other resources: (Specify: water, soil erosion, recreation, riparian, aesthetics, etc.)

Specify: water

Potential: Many aspect groups in unit indicate moist site. Spring development may be possible.

Limitations:



POTENTIAL
&
LIMITATIONS

3. Stewardship Resource Objectives

Having listed potential and limitations, refer back to Forest Stewardship Goals on page 4 and describe your objectives for each of the resources listed below:

Forested Range resource:

Improve forage via noxious weed control

Wildlife resource:

Improve elk & deer forage via noxious weed control

Timber resource:

Other resources: (Specify: water, soil erosion, recreation, riparian, aesthetics, etc.)

Specify: water

Possibly develops a water source for stock tank

4. What is Your Management Unit Emphasis?

MU emphasis is the forest resource (listed above) which will receive the highest priority.

☐ Timber

☐ Wildlife

☒ Range

☐ Other _____

5. Desired Future Condition

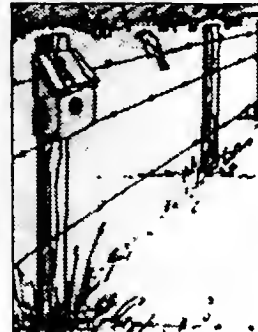


Knowing your MU emphasis, how do you want your MU to look in the future? Describe changes required to correct problems, enhance production of a resource and/or maintain currently desirable conditions.

Eliminate noxious weeds
Help new forest establishment by
removing poor quality trees
(as pulp logs)

Used Treatment

ing desired future conditions requires activities (treatments) designed to improve existing conditions. (Example: wildlife habitat modification, timber stand improvement, range improvement, fire and reduction, etc.) Each treatment requires a prescription detailing how the activity will be accomplished. (Attach a copy of this sheet for each additional treatment prescription.)



Treatment Prescription

a. Activity: Such as grass seeding, tree thinning, shrub planting, etc.

Spraying of weeds

b. Treatment Location: Acreage 18

MU sketch with treatment boundaries shown.

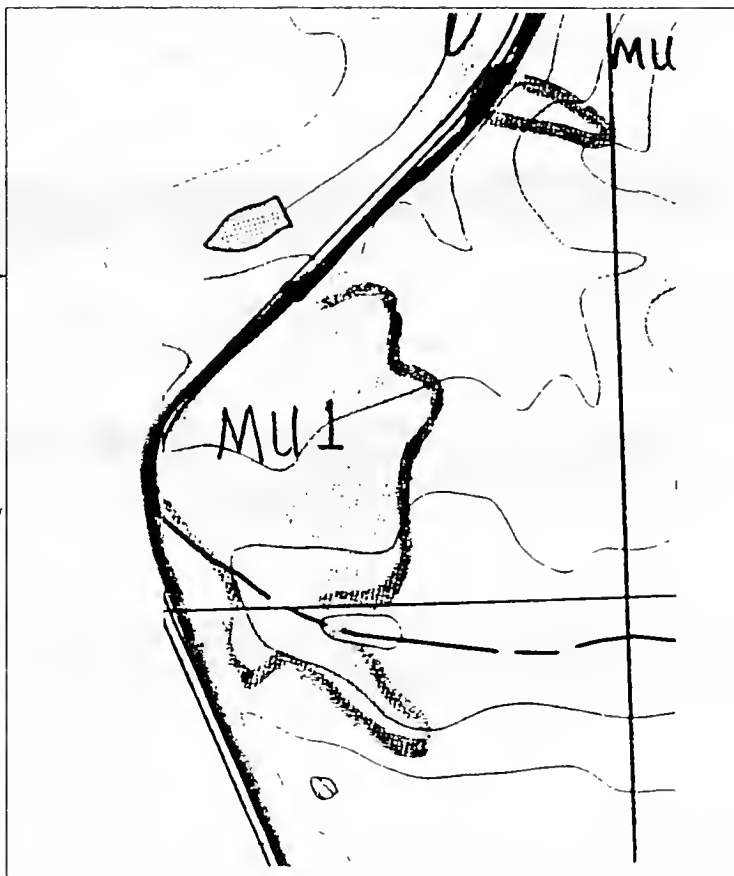
c. Treatment Sequence: When will you seek expert advice, obtain permits, develop contracts, apply for cost-share, implement treatment, follow-up activities, etc.

Spring: site visit/advice from
AKCS - spray in late spring

Summer: Monitor for weed
control

Fall: A/A

Winter: A/A



d. Treatment Method: How will the work be done? Describe materials, labor, tools, work specifications, etc.

spray using backpack and ATV mounted sprayer

e. Limitations and Constraints: Personal, biological, or physical limitations, easements, covenants, rare/endangered species, etc.

Avoid impacts on conifers/aspen by spraying outside root
zone, or use herbicide non lethal to trees

7. Treatment Effects on Forest Resources



Describe possible effects of the treatment on each forest resource below: (Use Forest Resource Trade-offs handout from Session 6.)

Effects
Acceptable?

Forested Range resource: Improved production preferred/desirable grasses and forbs

Wildlife resource: same as above

Timber resource: May impact a few aspens and conifers

Other resources: (Water, soil erosion, recreation, riparian, aesthetics, etc.) Specify: _____

8. Treatment Implementation and Cost Analysis (10 Year Planning Period)

| Time Period | Treatment Activity | Season | Net Cash Flow | |
|--------------|---------------------------|----------|---------------|--------|
| | | | Cost | Income |
| Years 1 - 2 | Herbicide Application | spring | \$ 50/acre | |
| | | | | |
| | | subtotal | | |
| Years 3 - 4 | Monitor / Apply as needed | " | | |
| | | | | |
| | | subtotal | | |
| Years 5 - 6 | Monitor / Apply | " | | |
| | | | | |
| | | subtotal | | |
| Years 7 - 8 | Monitor / Apply | " | | |
| | | | | |
| | | subtotal | | |
| Years 9 - 10 | Monitor / Apply | " | | |
| | | | | |
| | | subtotal | | |
| | | TOTAL | | |

Stewardship Resource Objectives

Having listed potential and limitations, refer back to Forest Stewardship Goals on page 4 and describe your objectives for each of the resources listed below:

Forested Range resource:

Improve forage via noxious weed control.

Wildlife resource:

Improve elk forage via noxious weed control.

Timber resource:

Other resources: (Specify: water, soil erosion, recreation, riparian, aesthetics, etc.)

Specify: Water

Possibly develops a water source for stock tank.

4. What is Your Management Unit Emphasis?

MU emphasis is the forest resource (listed above) which will receive the highest priority.

☐ Timber

☐ Wildlife

☒ Range

☐ Other _____

5. Desired Future Condition

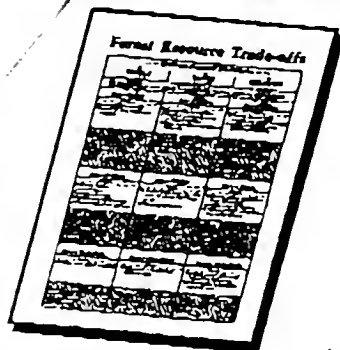
Knowing your MU emphasis, how do you want your MU to look in the future? Describe changes required to correct problems, enhance production of a resource and/or maintain currently desirable conditions.

Eliminate noxious weeds.

Help new Forest establishment by removing poor quality trees (as pulp logs).



Treatment Effects on Forest Resources



Describe possible effects of the treatment on each forest resource below: (Use Forest Resource Trade-offs handout from Session 6.)

Effects
Acceptable?

Forested Range resource: Improved production in preferred/desirable grasses and forbs.

Wildlife resource: Same as above

Timber resource: May impact ^{a few} aspens and conifers.

Other resources: (Water, soil erosion, recreation, riparian, aesthetics, etc.) Specify: _____

8. Treatment Implementation and Cost Analysis (10 Year Planning Period)

| Time Period | Treatment Activity | Season | Net Cash Flow | |
|--------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|--------|
| | | | Cost | Income |
| Years 1 - 2 | Herbicide Application | Summer Spring | \$50/acre (est.) | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | subtotal | | |
| Years 3 - 4 | Monitor / Apply as needed | " | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | subtotal | | |
| Years 5 - 6 | Monitor / Apply " " | " | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | subtotal | | |
| Years 7 - 8 | Monitor / " " | " | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | subtotal | | |
| Years 9 - 10 | Monitor / " " | " | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | subtotal | | |
| | | TOTAL | | |

MANLEY RANCH
CONSERVATION EASEMENT
SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT

MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS

Prepared by:
Rob Brooks
October, 2000

I. INTRODUCTION

House Bill 526, passed by the 1987 Legislature (MCA 87-1-241 and MCA 87-1-242), authorizes Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (MFWP) to acquire an interest in land for the purpose of protecting and improving wildlife habitat. These acquisitions can be through fee title, conservation easements, or leasing. In 1989, the Montana legislature passed House Bill 720 requiring that a socioeconomic assessment be completed when wildlife habitat is acquired using Habitat Montana monies. These assessments evaluate the significant social and economic impacts of the purchase on local governments, employment, schools, and impacts on local businesses.

This socioeconomic evaluation addresses the purchase of a conservation easement on property presently owned by the Manley Ranch. The report addresses the physical and institutional setting as well as the social and economic impacts associated with the proposed conservation easement.

II. PHYSICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

A. Property Description

The portion of the Manley Ranch proposed for a conservation easement is the southern most part of the ranch and lies within Granite and Powell counties. A detailed description of this property is included in the easement management plan.

B. Habitat and Wildlife Populations

The proposed easement land consists mainly of forested and grassland habitat. Wildlife that use this property include elk, deer, wolves, sandhill cranes, and cutthroat trout just to name a few.

C. Current Use

The Manley Ranch is a working cattle ranch.

D. Management Alternatives

- 1) Purchase a conservation easement on the property by MFWP
- 2) No purchase

Alternative 1, the purchase of a conservation easement will provide long-term protection for the agricultural activities this land supports as well as allow for the protection and enhancement of the native habitats and wildlife this land sustains.

The second alternative, the no purchase option, does not guarantee the protection of this parcel from future development.

MFWP Purchase of Conservation Easement

The intent of the Manley Ranch conservation easement is to protect and enhance the wildlife habitat currently found on the property while maintaining the agricultural character of the property. The Deed of Conservation Easement specifies the terms of the agreement. The major points presented here may affect the socioeconomic environment. They are:

- 1) Restrict residential subdivision or commercial development.
- 2) No commercial use of land and resources except those allowed by the Easement.
- 3) No new buildings or construction except that allowed by the Easement.
- 4) Mineral exploration/extraction are prohibited except for gravel to be used on the property.
- 5) No cultivation or farming allowed except that provided by the Easement.
- 6) No renting or leasing access to the land for recreational purposes except that allowed by the Easement.
- 7) No game farms.

A complete list of the restrictions this easement has on the landowners and MFWP is provided in the Deed of Conservation Easement for the Manley Ranch.

No Purchase Alternative

This alternative requires some assumptions since use and management of the property will vary depending on what the current owners decide to do with the property if MFWP does not purchase a conservation easement.

Subdivision or development of the land is a possibility. The economic impacts associated with this alternative have not been calculated.

III. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Section II identified the management alternatives this report addresses. The purchase of a conservation easement will provide long term protection of important wildlife habitat, keep the land in private ownership and provide for public access for hunting. Section III quantifies the

social and economic consequences of the two management alternatives following two basic accounting stances: financial and local area impacts.

Financial impacts address the cost of the conservation easement to MFWP and discuss the impacts on tax revenues to local government agencies including school districts.

Expenditure data associated with the use of the property provides information for analyzing the impacts these expenditures may have on local businesses (i.e. income and employment).

A. Financial Impacts

The financial impacts on MFWP are related to the purchase price of the conservation easement and maintenance/management costs. The Manley Ranch conservation easement will cost MFWP an estimated \$82,000 depending on the funding partnerships being negotiated. Range improvements associated with the grazing plan will cost approximately \$27,000. Maintenance/management costs related to the easement are associated with monitoring the property to insure the easement terms are being followed.

The financial impacts to local governments are the potential changes in tax revenues resulting from the purchase of the conservation easement. The Manley Ranch easement will leave the land in private ownership and will not change the type or level of use on the property. The purchase of a conservation easement on this land will have no impact on the current level of taxes paid to Granite and Powell Counties.

B. Economic Impacts

The purchase of a conservation easement will not affect the agricultural activities on the Manley Ranch. Consequently there will not be any significant financial impacts to local businesses associated with the ranching activities in the long term. The easement also provides for the commercial harvest of timber, which will have a positive impact on local businesses when the ranch chooses to exercise this option.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

As noted at the beginning of this document, the Manley Ranch is located in Granite and Powell counties between Drummond and Helmsville Montana.

The conservation easement will provide long term protection for wildlife habitat, maintain the agricultural integrity of the land, ensure public hunting opportunities and keep the property in private ownership.

The purchase of a conservation easement by MFWP will not cause a reduction in tax revenues on this property from their current levels to Granite and Powell counties.

The agricultural/ranching operations will continue at their current levels. Timber harvest is allowed under the terms of the conservation easement. The financial impacts of the easement on local businesses will be neutral to positive in both the short and long run.

